

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Victoria Adams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Adams, Victoria Gray, 1926-2006
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams,
Dates:	July 19, 2004 and October 12, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	15 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:59:38).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist Victoria Adams (1926 - 2006) was influential as a voting rights activist and national spokesperson for the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (MFDP). Adams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 19, 2004 and October 12, 2004, in Petersburg, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_098
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Victoria Jackson Gray Adams was born Victoria Jackson on November 5, 1926 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her mother died when Adams was just three years old, and she was raised on her paternal grandparents' farm. In 1945, she earned her high school diploma from DePriest Consolidated School and went on to attend Wilberforce University from 1945 until 1946, but had to return home to Mississippi when the family could no longer afford tuition.

Despite not having a degree, Adams was able to find work as a teacher in Mississippi. This led to her civil rights activities when she began teaching voter

registration classes in the early 1960s. In 1962, Adams became a full time civil rights activist when she became field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Her efforts would enable her to lead a boycott against Hattiesburg businesses and prepare the city for Freedom Summer 1964. Although married with three small children, Adams helped organize the alternative Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). In 1964, Adams, along with fellow activists Fannie Lou Hamer and Annie Devine, were chosen as the national spokespersons for the MFDP and attended the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. Although they were not seated, their efforts did lead to the Democratic Party integrating its ranks. In 1968, the three women were seated guests on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. Adams was also the first woman to run for national office in Mississippi. In 1968, Adams left the country with her second husband and moved to Thailand where she continued to fight against racism and discrimination against African American soldiers and their families.

Adams received numerous awards and honors for her activism. She was featured in the award-winning documentary *Eyes on the Prize* and several books. She was active in the SCLC and several other human rights organizations. Adams was also an adjunct professor at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Adams passed away on August 12, 2006 at the age of 79.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Victoria Adams was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on July 19, 2004 and October 12, 2004, in Petersburg, Virginia, and was recorded on 15 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist Victoria Adams (1926 - 2006) was influential as a voting rights activist and national spokesperson for the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (MFDP).

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Adams, Victoria Gray, 1926-2006

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

Adams, Victoria Gray, 1926-2006--Interviews
African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, July 19, 2004 and October 12, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
A2004_098_002_001, TRT: 0:31:23 2004/10/12

Victoria Adams was born on November 5, 1926 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her mother, Annie Mae Ott Jackson, grew up between Jones and Forrest counties in Mississippi. She passed away during surgery when Adams was three-years-old; Adams remembers being at her mother's funeral and dreaming that she was still alive. Adams' father, Mack Jackson, was industrious; her paternal ancestors were homesteaders who, after cultivating farmland for a period of time, became landowners. Her paternal grandparents, Conteen and Frozene McCullum Jackson, were farmers who raised Adams in Hattiesburg. Adams stayed busy on the farm by doing chores such as carrying water in from outside in cedar buckets. On Saturdays, when her work was finished, she liked to read. She remembers the sound of the train whistle at night and smells of nature after it rained. She attended DePriest Consolidated School in Hattiesburg. The memory of attending the school's baccalaureate service as a preschooler motivated Adams to finish high school.

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
A2004_098_002_002, TRT: 0:30:59 2004/10/12

Victoria Adams attended DePriest Consolidated School in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Independent and opinionated, she aspired to travel and teach, like her grandmother who was a former teacher. Adams was active in her school and taught Sunday school at St. John Methodist Church in Hattiesburg. Adams graduated from high school in 1945 and attended Wilberforce University in Ohio. She left after her first year because her family could not afford tuition. In 1947, while teaching at Benson High School, she married her first husband. Adams taught in several other counties in Mississippi but rebelled against her principals' management styles. In the early 1950s, her husband was drafted to serve in the Korean War, and the couple moved

to Germany for four years and had two children. After returning to the U.S., they moved to Washington, D.C. where Adams began selling Beauty Queen products. Sensing her marriage was ending, she moved back to Mississippi where she continued to operate a Beauty Queen franchise.

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
A2004_098_002_003, TRT: 0:30:58 2004/10/12

Victoria Adams became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s when she allowed SNCC leaders Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes to meet in her church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, against the orders of the local dean of the clergy. In 1962, she worked as a SNCC field secretary registering black people to vote and organized a boycott of businesses that fired employees for registering. She received death threats due to her involvement in the movement, but received an encouraging phone call from Medgar Evers. Adams ran for Mississippi state senator in 1963 to expose the lack of diversity in Congress. She, Fannie Lou Hamer and Annie Devine established the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party which attended the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1964, but refused the two at-large seats that were offered because they did not constitute true representation. During 1964 Freedom Summer, along with the National Council of Churches, Adams helped organize the first Freedom Day.

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
A2004_098_002_004, TRT: 0:30:53 2004/10/12

Victoria Adams was attending a training in Oxford, Ohio along with Rita Schwerner and Annie Devine when Michael Schwerner, James Earl Chaney and Andrew Goodman went missing during the 1964 Freedom Summer. Singing provided Adams strength to continue civil rights efforts after violence like Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman's deaths. In 1965, she and fellow delegates of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) went to Washington, D.C. to challenge the election of Mississippi's Congressional delegation. They were arrested for trespassing when they refused to leave the clerk's office. However, they won their defense because

they had an appointment slip. Adams, Devine and Fannie Lou Hamer finally got a Congressional hearing for their challenge. Adams reflects upon Hamer's notoriety as a civil rights leader and describes her as a spiritual person with a great sense of humor. In the late 1960s, Adams relocated with her second husband to Thailand where she became an organizer for African American soldiers' wives.

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
A2004_098_002_005, TRT: 0:29:49 2004/10/12

Victoria Adams organized African American wives of soldiers while at Fort Myer, Virginia and later at Fort Lee, Virginia where she became president of the wives club. In the late 1970s, she began her real estate career; she convinced African Americans to consider buying property instead of renting. Adams advocated for a campus ministry at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia after discovering there were no Baptist or Methodist churches on campus, and the nearest black United Methodist Church was in Richmond, Virginia. The school considered hiring a white minister; however, Adams was hired as the campus minister of the Methodist Wesley Foundation in 1989. Adams taught civil rights history at Southern Mississippi State University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi where she was disappointed with the lack of African American students in the program. She reflects upon her life experiences and concludes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_001, TRT: 0:30:14 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_001E, TRT: 0:30:14 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_002, TRT: 0:30:15 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_002E, TRT: 0:30:15 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section

B2004_098_001_003E, TRT: 0:31:00 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_004, TRT: 0:30:56 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_004E, TRT: 0:30:56 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_005, TRT: 0:10:23 2004/07/19

Video Oral History Interview with Victoria Adams, Section
B2004_098_001_005E, TRT: 0:10:23 2004/07/19